DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 090 258 TM 003 532

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TITLE Nonreactive Measures of Behavior Change Following Human Relations Training.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, Illinois, April 15-19, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); *Behavior Change; Discipline Problems; Elementary School Teachers; Evaluation Techniques; *Human Relations; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Program Evaluation; Secondary School Teachers; Student Behavior; *Teacher Behavior; Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

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ED 090258

Session 12.17

(100 word summary)

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TM 003 532

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Abstract

Reported are the effects of a structured inservice human relations training program on teacher coping behaviors in response to student misbehaviors. Sixty teachers from Title One elementary, junior, and senior level schools were randomly assigned to three experimental and three control groups. Changes in coping behavior were assessed by three nonreactive measures: discipline cards, psychological, and counseling referrals four weeks before and four weeks after the training program. Results showed significantly fewer psychological and counseling referrals at the elementary and junior levels and fewer discipline cards at the elementary level for the experimental groups as compared with the control groups.

Statement of Problem

Much research evaluating the effectiveness of inservice human relations training programs for public school teachers has been reported in the literature. A great deal of this research involves the assessment of changes in attitudes and beliefs of teachers regarding teacher-student relationships which have been attributed to the treatment program. Many of these studies are of the one shot, short-term treatment, pre- post-test variety with no follow-up of treatment effects. Methodologically this kind of study lacks rigor in design and stands up poorly to the usual criteria

of internal and external validity of experimental research. More importantly, the results and the consequent theoretical and practical significance of these studies are very questionable because of the assumptions implicit or explicit in their design. Often studies showing attitude change following short-term treatment programs assume that the teachers' behavior will likewise change. This assumption is not very well substantiated in the organizational literature. In other studies it is assumed that attitude and/or behavior change will be sustained over a long period of time. Again this assumption has very little support either in the literature or in the observations of experienced school personnel. With these shortcomings in mind, the research and training program, which are described below, were designed. The results reported in this paper are part of a larger research endeavor.

This research program endeavored to ascertain the effects of a structured inservice human relations training program on the actual classroom behaviors of public school teachers at the elementary, secondary, and junior high school levels in Title One schools in a large metropolitan area. Specifically, this research program evaluated changes in teacher behavior by way of three nonreactive behavioral measures: discipline cards, psychological referrals, and counseling referrals before and one month after the six week training program. It was hypothesized that teachers would learn new coping techniques for dealing with classroom problems and subsequently the teacher could expect a decrease in the number of teacher-student confrontations.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this human relations program was based on Jerome Bruner's discussion of coping and defending behavior. Bruner suggests

that coping behavior is superior in solving problems, and that coping behavior can be learned. The six week human relations training program endeavored to help inner-city teachers to develop more appropriate coping techniques for dealing with common classroom discipline problems. Rudolph Dreikurs' model for understanding maladaptive behavior in children and adolescents was utilized as the basis for teacher understanding of classroom misbehavior and as a basis for developing appropriate coping behaviors.

Procedure

The design of the human relations training program specified six structured sessions. Each session dealt with one of the following behavior problems: rebelliousness; asocial values; alienating language; physical violence, harm; attention getting; and misbehavior resulting from lack of teacher supervision. The experimental group engaged in simulation activities to develop an understanding and coping techniques to deal with each of the behavior problems. These teachers viewed films, role played, and dealt with written materials which presented specific examples of the above mentioned behaviors. Group discussion was used to further this process of internalizing new coping techniques as well as sharing experiences of previous successful use of coping techniques. One group leader facilitated and stimulated teacher input and stimulation as well as structured the meetings for all of the experimental groups. As a result of learning these new coping behaviors, it was expected that a decreasing number of negative teacher-student confrontations would occur.

The following evaluations instruments were used to collect data from all experimental and control group subjects: 1) discipline cards; 2) psychological referrals; and 3) counseling referrals. All three of these forms

are written by teachers and submitted to the appropriate administrator whenever the teacher could not otherwise cope with students exhibiting negative behaviors. Data were collected for a four week period before the training program and for four weeks subsequent to the last session of the training program. Neither the teachers nor the administrators were aware of the collection of data.

Subjects

The subjects consisted of experienced teachers from three representative Title One public schools in the central city. In the metropolitan area studied, three high schools, three junior high schools, and twenty-two elementary schools have Title One designation. Teachers from these three representative schools were asked to volunteer for participation in this study. (Voluntary participation is a school board requirement for all research conducted in this school system.) From this list of volunteers, ten teachers were randomly selected to the control group and ten for the experimental group in each of the three schools. Thus a total of thirty experimental and thirty control group subjects were selected. There were three treatment groups of ten teachers each representing the three school levels. A preliminary analysis showed there to be no significant difference between experimental and control groups prior to the experimental treatment.

Results and Conclusions

A pre-test, post-test control group design was employed for testing the hypotheses. Because the data did not meet the necessary criteria for the use of a parametric statistic, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to determine differences between the experimental and control groups with regard to the three nonreactive measures: discipline cards,

psychological referrals, and counseling referrals.

Results showed that the control group submitted significantly fewer discipline cards than the control group at the elementary school level. The number of psychological and counseling referrals were significantly less for the experimental groups at the elementary and junior high school levels. It appears that the training program had most effect on the elementary school level and least effect on the high school level. No significant differences in behavioral measures were noted between the control and experimental groups at the high school level. There appears to be a pattern of increasing relationship difficulty between teacher and student from the elementary through secondary school grades.

The results of this study suggest that elementary school students appear to be more amenable to change and less incorrigible than junior high and high school students. Consequently, training programs which outfit teachers with coping techniques are more likely to help in the resolution and elimination of certain student misbehaviors in the early rather than in the later grades. However, care must be taken in generalizing the results of this experiment. Statistically, the results can be generalized to the Title One schools in one metropolitan area. But since all Title One designated schools in other cities are similar in socio-economic status and other demographic facts, the results of this training program may be of some practical significance for these schools as a whole.

The theoretical significance of this study is the use of nonreactive behavioral measures to assess the effects of a humanistically-based behavior change training program. No similar nonreactive studies have been found in the literature. The fact that a training program affected sustained behavior change, for at least one month after the treatment, is

important in this age of accountability.

Furthermore, the fact that this training program has been instituted as an in-system, inservice credit course endorsed by the school board adds to its merit.